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(54) **ACTUATOR AND LINEAR POSITION
SENSOR ASSEMBLY**

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

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See application file for complete search history.

(71) Applicant: **CTS Corporation**, Elkhart, IN (US)

(72) Inventors: **William D. Storrie**, Motherwell (GB);
Steven Brown, Amadale (GB); **Gerard
McCafferty**, Glasgow (GB)

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(73) Assignee: **CTS CORPORATION**, Elkhart, IN
(US)

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Primary Examiner — Reena Aurora

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Daniel Deneufbourg

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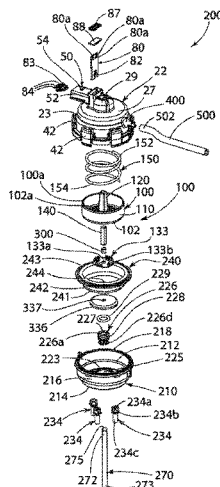
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ABSTRACT

An actuator and sensor assembly with a housing defining a pocket and an access opening. A substrate with a sensor is located in the pocket through the access opening. A nozzle extends from the housing. A sleeve surrounds the nozzle and retains a hose on the nozzle. A connector assembly is located opposite and normal the pocket and the substrate. Compliant terminal pins extend generally normally from the connector assembly into the pocket and through-holes in the substrate. An actuator shaft gimbal includes a head located in a housing collar and a flexible neck extends through a housing aperture. A shoulder on the neck of the gimbal locks the gimbal in the collar.

12 Claims, 5 Drawing Sheets



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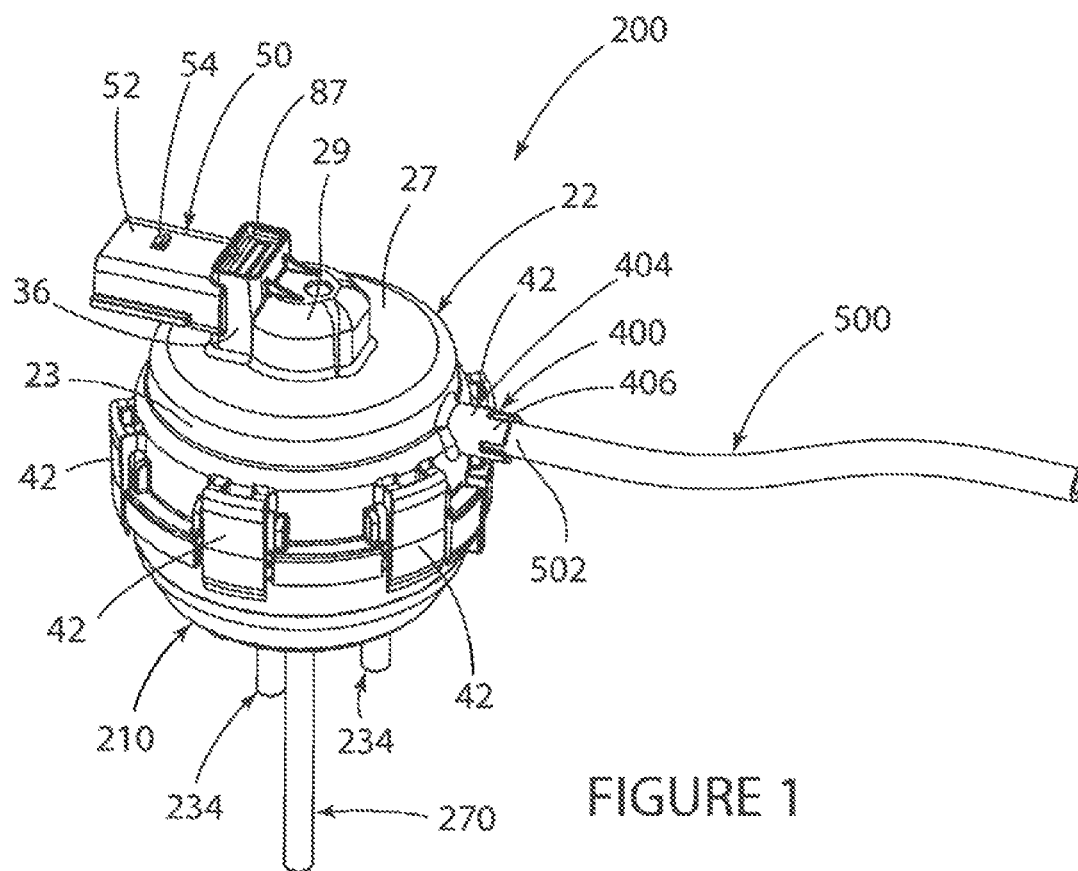
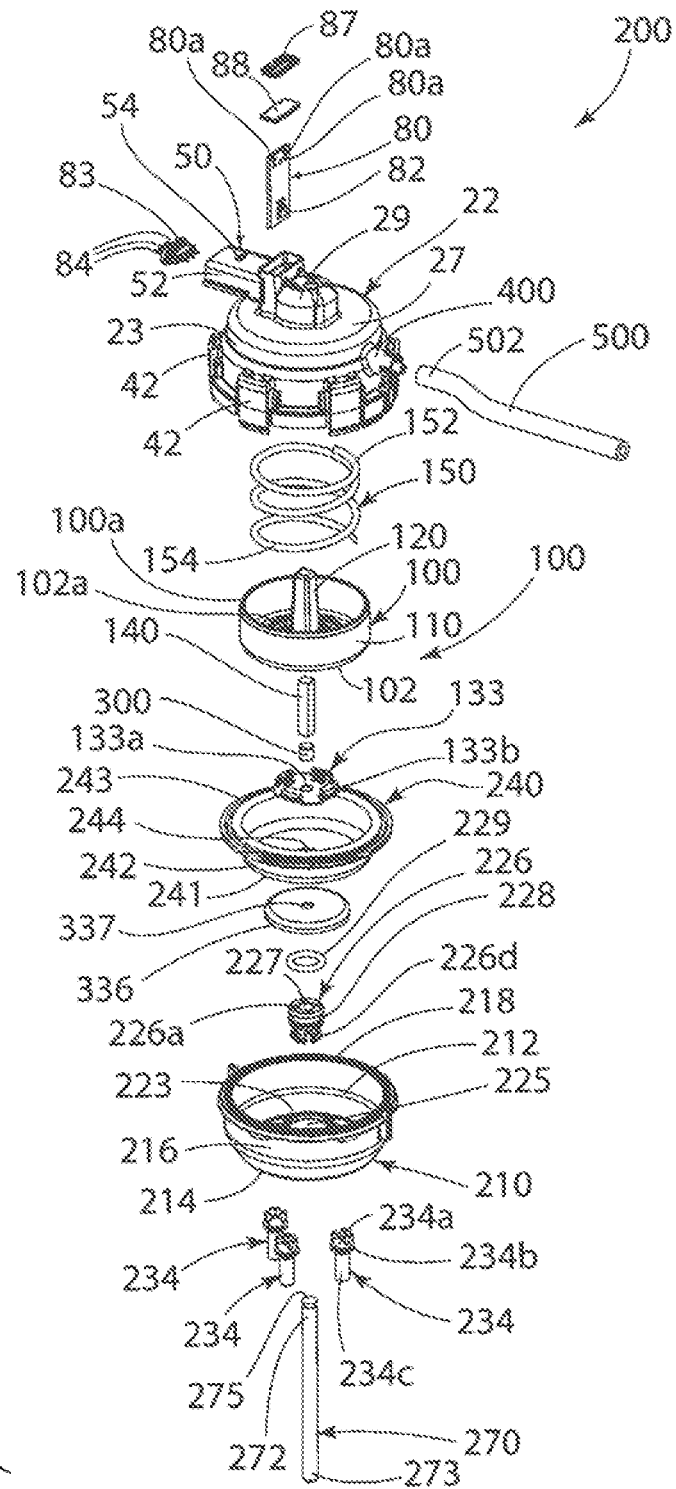


FIGURE 2



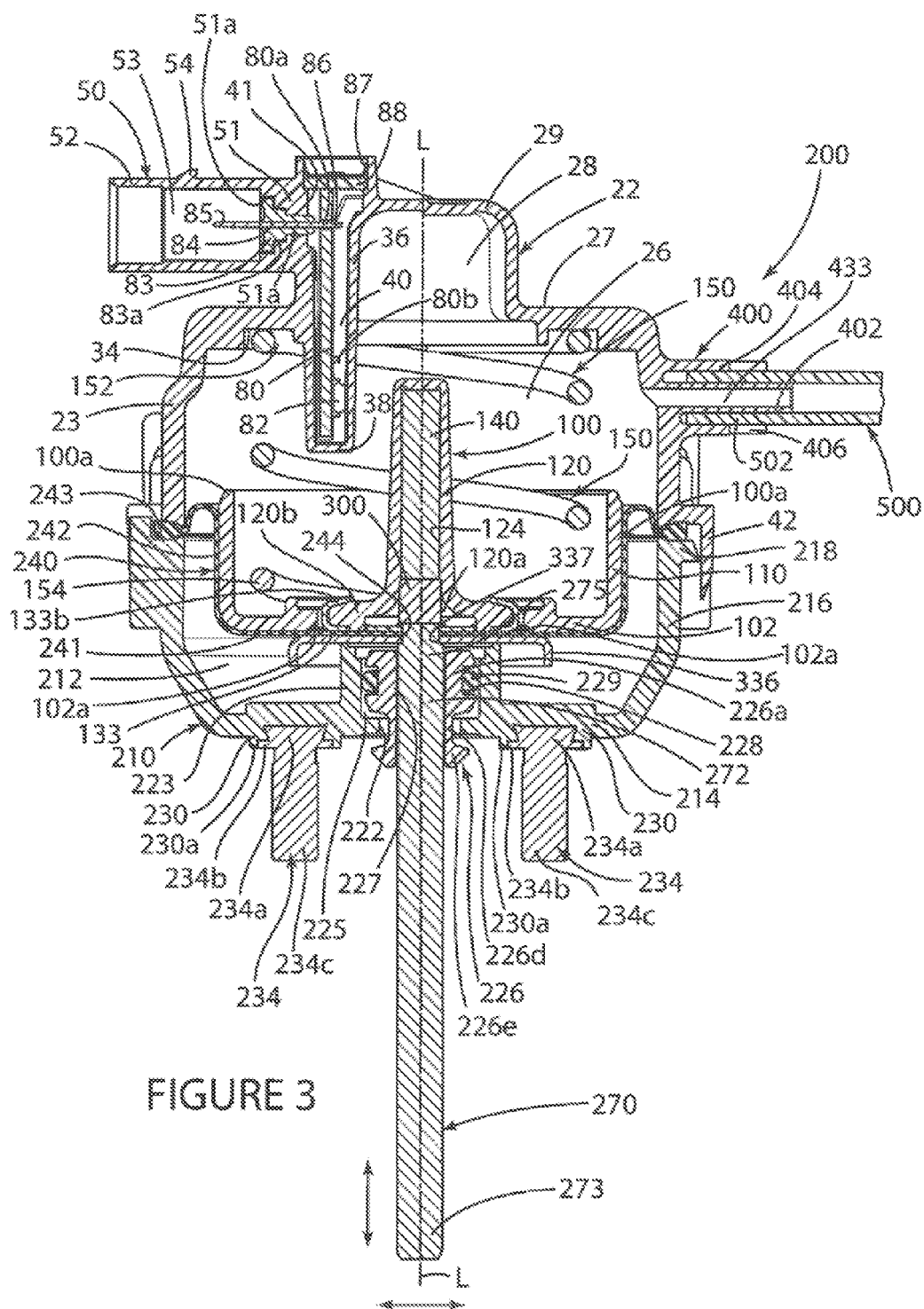
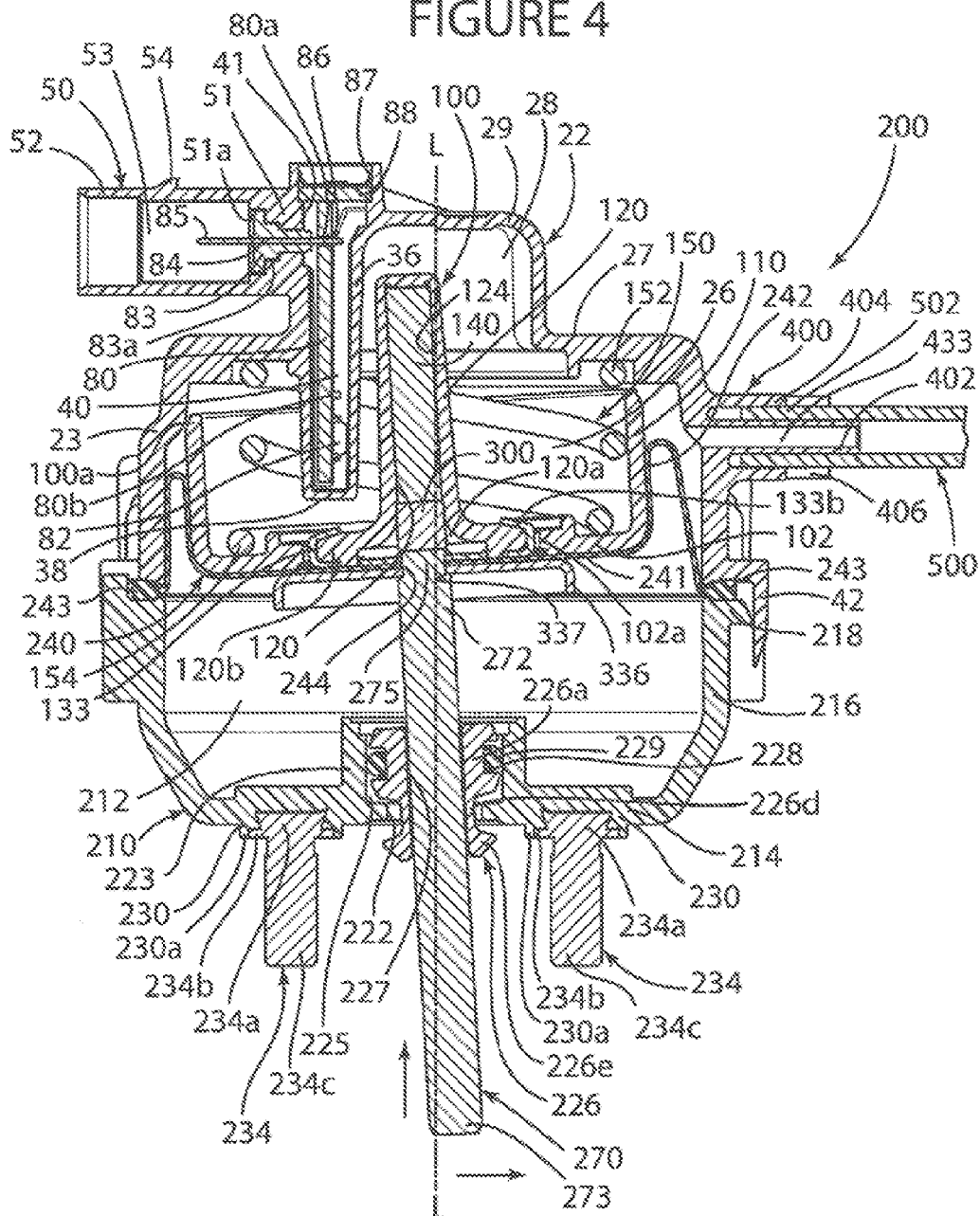
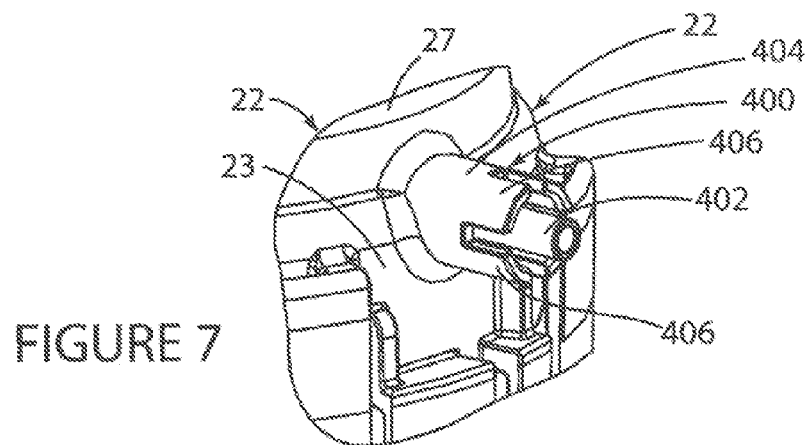
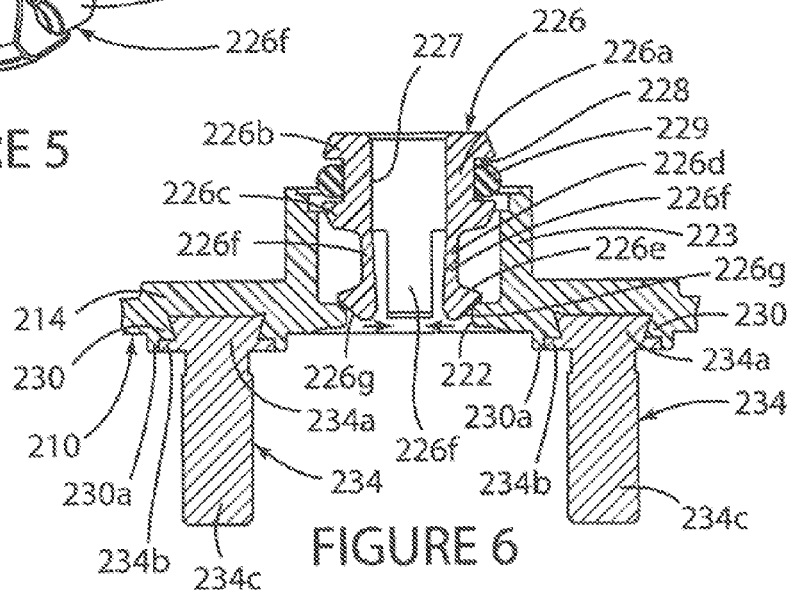
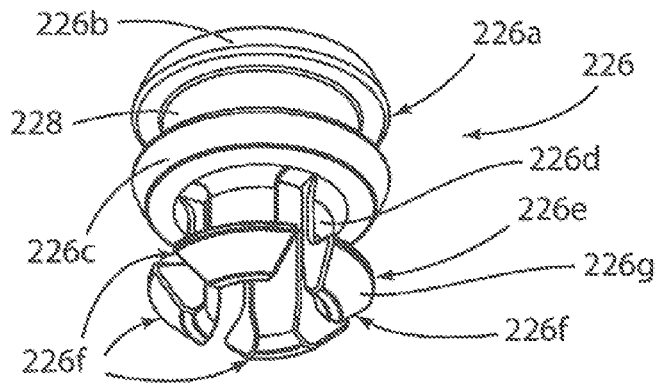


FIGURE 4





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ACTUATOR AND LINEAR POSITION SENSOR ASSEMBLY

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED AND CO-PENDING APPLICATIONS

This application is a continuation-in-part application which claims the benefit of the filing date of co-pending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 14/191,009 filed on Feb. 26, 2014 which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 12/962,773 filed on Dec. 8, 2010 now U.S. Pat. No. 8,664,047 issued on Mar. 4, 2014.

This application also claims the benefit of the filing date and disclosure of U.S. Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 61/903,144 filed on Nov. 12, 2013 which is incorporated herein by reference as are all references cited therein.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates, in general, to an actuator and sensor assembly and, more particularly, to a non-contacting linear position sensor coupled to an actuator.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Position sensing is used to electronically monitor the position or movement of a mechanical component. The position sensor is coupled to an actuator and is adapted to produce an electrical signal that varies as the position of the component in question varies. Actuator and sensor assemblies are included in many products. For example, actuator and sensor assemblies allow the status of various automotive components to be monitored and controlled electronically.

A position sensor needs to be accurate, in that it must give an appropriate electrical signal based upon the position measured. If inaccurate, a position sensor may hinder the proper evaluation and control of the position of the component being monitored.

Typically, it is also a requirement that a position sensor be adequately precise in its measurement. However, the precision needed in measuring a position will obviously vary depending upon the particular circumstances of use. For some purposes, only a rough indication of position is necessary; for instance, an indication of whether a valve is mostly open or mostly closed. In other applications, more precise indication of position may be needed.

A position sensor should also be sufficiently durable for the environment in which it is placed. For example, a position sensor used on an automotive valve may experience almost constant movement while the automobile is in operation. Such a position sensor should be constructed of mechanical and electrical components adequate to allow the sensor to remain sufficiently accurate and precise during its projected lifetime, despite considerable mechanical vibrations and thermal extremes and gradients.

In the past, position sensors were typically of the "contact" variety. A contacting position sensor requires physical contact to produce the electrical signal. Contacting position sensors typically consist of potentiometers that produce electrical signals which vary as a function of the component's position. Contacting position sensors are generally accurate and precise. Unfortunately, the wear due to contact during movement has limited their durability. Also, the friction resulting from the contact can degrade the operation of the component. Further, water intrusion into a potentiometric sensor can disable the sensor.

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One advancement in sensor technology has been the development of non-contacting position sensors. A non-contacting position sensor ("NPS") does not require physical contact between the signal generator and the sensing element. Instead, an NPS utilizes one or more magnets to generate magnetic fields that vary as a function of position, and devices to detect varying magnetic fields to measure the position of the component to be monitored. Often, a Hall Effect device is used to produce an electrical signal that is dependent upon the magnitude, polarity, or direction of the magnetic flux incident upon the device. The Hall Effect device may be physically attached to the component to be monitored and thus moves relative to the stationary magnet(s) as the component moves. Conversely, the Hall Effect device may be stationary with the magnet(s) affixed directly or indirectly to the component to be monitored. In either case, the position of the component to be monitored can be determined by the electrical signal produced by the Hall Effect device.

Although currently available actuator and NPS assemblies have proven satisfactory, there continues to be a need for improved, lower cost actuator and NPS assemblies.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is directed to an actuator and sensor assembly comprising a sensor housing including an interior wall defining a pocket accessible through an opening in the sensor housing, a sensor substrate located in the pocket through the opening in the sensor housing, the sensor substrate having a sensor and defining a plurality of conductive through-holes, a hose retention assembly including a nozzle extending from the sensor housing and a sleeve surrounding and spaced from the nozzle, a hose coupled to and surrounding the nozzle and the sleeve surrounding and abutting against the hose for retaining the hose on the nozzle, a connector assembly associated with the sensor housing and located opposite and generally normal to the pocket and the substrate and including a plurality of compliant terminal pins extending into the pocket and the plurality of through-holes in the sensor substrate respectively, an actuator housing coupled to the sensor housing and together defining an interior cavity and an actuator housing aperture in communication with the interior cavity, the actuator housing including an interior collar, a gimbal including a head located in the collar and a flexible neck extending through the actuator housing aperture in the actuator housing and terminating in a shoulder that retains the gimbal in the collar of the actuator housing, an O-ring surrounding the head of the gimbal and in sealing abutting relationship with the interior surface of the collar of the actuator housing, a magnet carrier located and movable in the interior cavity and including, a magnet adapted to generate a magnetic field and the sensor adapted to sense a change in the magnetic field in response to the movement of the carrier and the magnet in the interior cavity relative to the sensor, and an actuator shaft including a first end extending through the aperture in the actuator housing and the gimbal and coupled to the magnet carrier.

In one embodiment, the actuator and sensor assembly further comprises a flexible diaphragm located in the interior cavity, the magnet carrier being seated on the flexible diaphragm, a spring located in the interior cavity against the magnet carrier and biasing the magnet carrier in a first position, and a source of pressurization coupled to one of the sensor housing or the actuator housing and in fluid flow communication with the interior cavity for adjusting the

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pressure in the interior cavity and causing the movement of the flexible diaphragm and the magnet carrier.

In one embodiment, a plurality of clips on one of the sensor housing or the actuator housing couple the sensor housing and the actuator housing together.

In one embodiment, a plug seals the opening defined in the sensor housing and a spacer located in the pocket between the substrate and the plug for exerting a compressive force against the substrate and preventing vibration of the substrate.

In one embodiment, the plurality of terminal pins extend through the interior wall of the pocket and into the pocket.

In one embodiment, the connector assembly further comprises a holder for the plurality of terminal pins, the holder being retained in a through-hole defined in the interior wall of the pocket.

In one embodiment, the neck of the gimbal is comprised of a plurality of spaced apart ribs adapted for flexing movement towards and away from each other during coupling of the gimbal to the collar of the actuator housing.

The present invention is also directed to a sensor assembly comprising a sensor housing including an interior wall defining a pocket accessible through an opening defined in the sensor housing, a substrate located in the interior pocket through the opening in the sensor housing and defining a plurality of conductive through-holes, a sensor on the substrate, a connector assembly unitary with the sensor housing and positioned in a relationship opposite and generally normal to the pocket and the substrate, the connector assembly including a plurality of compliant terminal pins extending into the plurality of conductive through-holes in the substrate and in a relationship generally normal to the substrate, and a magnet located in the sensor housing in a relationship spaced from the pocket of the sensor housing and the sensor, the magnet generating a magnetic field and the sensor adapted to sense a change in the magnitude and direction of the magnetic field in response to the movement of the magnet relative to the sensor.

In one embodiment, the connector assembly includes a holder for the plurality of terminal pins, the holder being retained in the interior wall of the pocket.

The present invention is further directed to an actuator assembly comprising an actuator housing defining an interior cavity and an interior wall defining an aperture in communication with the interior cavity, the actuator housing including an interior collar, a gimbal including a head located in the collar and a flexible neck extending through the aperture in the actuator housing and terminating in a shoulder that retains the gimbal in the collar of the actuator housing, an O-ring surrounding the head of the gimbal and in sealing abutting relationship with the interior surface of the collar of the actuator housing, and

an actuator shaft including a first end extending through the aperture in the actuator housing and the gimbal and coupled to the magnet carrier.

In one embodiment, the flexible neck is comprised of a plurality of flexible ribs each including a shoulder having an exterior angled surface, the ribs being adapted for flexing movement towards and away from each other when the gimbal is secured to the collar of the actuator housing.

In one embodiment, an actuator shaft extends through the gimbal.

Other advantages and features of the present invention will be more readily apparent from the following detailed

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description of the preferred embodiment of the invention, the accompanying drawings, and the appended claims.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

In the accompanying drawings that form part of the specification, and in which like numerals are employed to designate like parts throughout the same:

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of an actuator and linear position sensor assembly in accordance with the present invention;

FIG. 2 is an exploded perspective view of the actuator and linear position sensor assembly shown in FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is a vertical cross-sectional view of the actuator and linear position sensor assembly shown in FIG. 1 with the magnet assembly and actuator rod fully retracted in the assembly;

FIG. 4 is a vertical cross-sectional view of the actuator and linear position sensor assembly shown in FIG. 1 with the magnet assembly and actuator rod extended in the assembly

FIG. 5 is an enlarged perspective view of the gimbal of the actuator and linear position sensor assembly of the present invention;

FIG. 6 is a broken vertical cross-sectional view depicting the assembly of the gimbal shown in FIG. 5 to the actuator housing of the actuator end linear position sensor assembly; and

FIG. 7 is an enlarged broken perspective view of the hose retention assembly of the actuator and linear position sensor assembly of the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE EMBODIMENT

An actuator and linear position sensor assembly **200** in accordance with the present invention is shown in FIGS. 1, 2, 3, and 4.

Actuator and sensor assembly **200** initially comprises an upper or top sensor housing or cover member **22** and a separate lower or bottom actuator housing member **210** which are coupled and clipped together and define an interior housing or enclosure or chamber for a plurality of elements including a combination piston/magnet carrier assembly **100** and a spring **150** as described in more detail below.

Sensor housing or cover member **22** which, in the embodiment shown is made from a suitable injection molded plastic and is generally dome-shaped, includes a horizontal top well or roof **27** and a unitary downwardly and vertically extending circumferential exterior skirt wall **23**. The roof **27** and the skirt wall **23** together define an interior sensor housing cavity or chamber **26** (FIGS. 3 and 4).

Referring to FIGS. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 7, a hose retention and coupling device or assembly **400** extends generally horizontally outwardly from the exterior surface of the skirt wall **23** in a relationship generally normal to the central vertical longitudinal axis L of the assembly **200**.

The hose retention and coupling assembly **400** comprises a nozzle **402** defining an interior port or passage **433** (FIGS. 3 and 4) in fluid flow communication with the interior of the sensor housing cavity **26**. The nozzle **402** is connected to a source of pneumatic fluid such as air via a hollow air hose **500** extending between the nozzle **402** and the source of pneumatic fluid.

The hose retention and coupling device or assembly **400** also includes a retention and protection sleeve or shroud or collar **404** surrounding and spaced from the nozzle **402**. The

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sleeve 404 terminates in a plurality of spaced-apart and circumferentially extending flexible hose retention fingers or tabs 406.

The hose 500 is secured to the hose retention and coupling device or assembly 400, i.e., the end 502 of the hose 500 is slid over and coupled to the end of the nozzle 402. Still more specifically, the hose 500 is coupled to the nozzle 402 in a relationship with the end 502 of the hose 500, and more specifically the interior surface of the end 502 of the hose 500, surrounding and abutted against the exterior circumferential surface of the nozzle 402 and the interior circumferential surface of the sleeve 404 surrounding and abutted against the exterior circumferential surface of the hose 500. Thus, in the embodiment shown, the hose 500 is sandwiched between the nozzle 402 and the sleeve 404.

The retention tabs or fingers 406 are adapted for flexing into the exterior surface of the hose 500 to securely retain the hose 500 on the nozzle 402. The sleeve or shroud 404 also advantageously provides and defines a cover that protects the nozzle 402 from external objects and damage during transit and also during operation.

A circumferential recess or groove 34 (FIGS. 3 and 4) is defined in a portion of the interior surface of the roof 27 of the housing member 22 and is positioned in a relationship surrounding the dome 29.

A dome 29 projects unitarily upwardly and outwardly form the exterior surface of the roof 27 and defines an interior hollow dome shaped cavity 28 (FIGS. 3 and 4) that opens into and is in communication with the interior sensor housing cavity 26.

Referring specifically to FIGS. 3 and 4, an elongate and generally vertically extending sensor/substrate interior cavity or pocket 40 is defined in the dome 29 of the housing member 22 and is accessible through an access opening 41 defined in the top surface of the dome 29. The pocket 40 is defined by a circumferentially extending wall 35 that projects and extends vertically downwardly into the cavity 26 of the housing member 22 from the interior surface of the top of the dome 29. The wall 36 terminates in a horizontal lower wall 38 that closes the bottom of the pocket 40 and isolates and separates the pocket 40 from the interior cavity 26.

In the embodiment shown, the vertical interior wall 36 and vertical interior pocket 40 defined by the vertical interior wall 36 extend in the same direction as the central longitudinal vertical axis L of the assembly 200 and, in the embodiment shown, are both positioned in an off-setting, spaced-apart, and generally parallel relationship relative to the longitudinal vertical central axis L of the assembly 200.

A plurality of generally L-shaped flexible elongate clips or fingers 42 (FIGS. 1, 2, 3, and 4) protrude outwardly from the distal end of the skirt well 23 of the housing member 22 and are adapted to allow the clipping of the sensor housing member 22 to the actuator housing member 210.

A connector assembly 50 (FIGS. 1, 2, 3, and 4), which may also be made from any suitable injection molded plastic, is unitary with the roof 27 of the housing member 22 and, more specifically, extends unitarily horizontally outwardly from the side wall of the dome 29 of the housing member 22 and still more specifically extends unitarily normally outwardly from the wall 36 of the pocket 40. In the embodiment shown, the nozzle 402 and connector assembly 50 are located on opposite sides of the central vertical longitudinal axis L of the assembly 200 and the connector assembly 50 is located and positioned directly opposite and spaced from and generally normal to the wall 36, the pocket 40, and the substrate 80.

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Connector assembly 50 includes a body 51 and a shroud 52 that extends unitarily from the body 51. The body 51 is unitary with the wall 36 of the pocket 40 and the wall 36 separates the pocket 40 from the interior of the connector assembly 50. The shroud 52 defines an open interior 53 (FIGS. 3 and 4). A locking tab 54 is located on and projects outwardly from a top exterior surface of the shroud 52. An electrical connector (not shown) is adapted to be coupled to the end of the shroud 52 and retained to the shroud 52 by the locking tab 54. The electrical connector (not shown) may be connected to a wire harness (not shown).

Connector assembly 60 includes a compliant in holder or retainer 83 (FIGS. 2, 3, and 4) that includes a plurality of (namely three) electrically conductive compliant terminal or connector pins 84 that are insert-molded into and extend through the body of the retainer 83. In the embodiment shown, the pins 84 are insert molded in the retainer 83 in a spaced-apart, co-planar, and parallel relationship relative to each other.

The retainer 83 is retained in the interior of the connector assembly 50 and the shroud 52 and more specifically is retained in the body 51 of the connector assembly 50 and wall 36 and still more specifically is retained in a through-hole defined by an interior circumferential wall 51a defined in the body 51 and wall 36 that separates the connector assembly 50 from the pocket 40.

In the embodiment shown, the retainer 83 includes an exterior surface 83a that includes a plurality of steps or shoulders and the interior wall 51a includes a plurality of steps or shoulders adapted to mate or mesh with the plurality of steps or shoulders on the exterior surface 83a of the retainer 83 so as to provide for a secure and accurate alignment and positioning of the retainer 83 in the connector assembly 50 and more specifically to provide for an accurate alignment of the pins 84 relative to and with the through-holes 80a defined in the substrate 80 during assembly.

Each of the pins 84 defines respective opposed distal ends 85 and 86 (FIGS. 3 and 4). The pin end 85 is located in the interior cavity 53 defined by the shroud 52 and is adapted for connection to the electrical connector (not shown). The pins 84 and the respective ends 86 thereof extend through the body 51 and wall 36, into the pocket 40, and through the body of the substrate or printed circuit board 80 located in the pocket 40. In the embodiment shown, the retainer 83 and the pins 84 are disposed and oriented and positioned in a relationship opposite and generally normal to the substrate 80 and the longitudinal axis L of the assembly 200.

The compliant design of the pins 84 eliminates the need for wire bonding or soldering of the terminal pins 84 to the through-holes 80a of the substrate 80. Additionally, the design shown with the connector assembly 50 and the terminal pins 84 located directly opposite and generally normal to the wall 36, the pocket 40, and the substrate 80 allows the pins 84 to be pushed directly normally inwardly through the connector assembly 50, the wall 36, the pocket 40, and into the respective through-holes 80a in the substrate 80 during the manufacturing and assembly of the assembly 200.

Substrate 80 can be a conventional printed circuit board formed from FR4 or the like material. The substrate 80 extends vertically through the pocket 40 in an offset, spaced, and parallel relationship relative to the central longitudinal vertical axis L of the assembly 200. In the embodiment shown, the substrate 80 defines a plurality of (namely three) through-holes 80a (FIGS. 2, 3, and 4) extending through the body and opposed sides of the substrate 80. In the embodiment shown, the through-holes 80a are positioned adjacent

and spaced from the top edge of the substrate **80** and in a spaced-apart, co-linear, and parallel relationship relative to each other. The through-holes **80a** are defined by respective interior circumferential surfaces covered with a layer of electrically conductive material.

During the assembly process and as shown in FIG. 2, the substrate **80** is inserted vertically downwardly and inwardly into the pocket **40** via and through the access opening **41** defined in the top of the dome **29** of the housing member **22**. Also, during the assembly process, and following insertion of the substrate **80** into the pocket **40**, the pin retainer **83** is inserted horizontally forwardly or inwardly into the interior of the connector assembly **50** and more specifically into the interior of the shroud **52** thereof and still more specifically into the aperture **51a** in the body **51** and wall **36** and the end **85** of the pins **84** are extended into the pocket **40** and through the respective through-holes **80a** in the substrate **80**.

Thereafter, a separate press-fit cover or top or plug **87** is inserted over and seals the opening **41**. The plug **87** could also be adapted for ultrasonic welding to the opening **41** of the housing member **22**. A spacer **88** (FIGS. 2, 3, and 4) is positioned in the pocket **40** between, and in an abutting relationship with, the top peripheral edge of the substrate **80** and the plug **86**. During assembly, the plug **86**, which is press-fitted into the opening **41** in the top of the dome **29**, exerts a compressive force against the spacer **88** which in turn exerts a compressive force against the top peripheral edge of the substrate **80** for supporting, securing, and preventing vibration and movement of the substrate **80** and sensor **82** thereon during use of the assembly **200** and also for assuring continued abutting electrical contact between the terminal pins **84** and the interior surface of the respective substrate through-holes **80a** and preventing vibration damage to the pins **84**.

Additionally, or in lieu of, the plug **87** and spacer **88**, a curable epoxy or the like material can be dispensed into the pocket **40** through the opening **41** to a level covering the top of the substrate **80** for further securing the substrate **80** in the pocket **40** against vibration. A low pressure over mold operation could also be used in lieu of epoxy.

A sensor **82** (FIGS. 2, 3, and 4) is mounted to one of the exterior side surfaces of the distal or lower end of the substrate **80**. Sensor **82** can be a magnetic field sensor such as a Hall Effect device. In one embodiment, the sensor **82** is an integrated circuit available from Melexis Corporation of Leper, Belgium which is adapted to sense and measure at least changes in the magnitude and direction of the magnetic field generated by the magnet **140**.

Other electronic components, generally designated with the numeral **80b** in FIGS. 3 and 4, including for example capacitors, resistors, inductors and other signal conditioning components, are mounted on one or both of the exterior side surfaces of the substrate **80**. Additionally, it is understood that one or more circuit lines (not shown) are also located and defined on or in the substrate **80** for electrically connecting the sensor **82** and the other electronic components **80b** thereon to the end **86** of the respective compliant pins **84** of the connector assembly **50**.

The actuator assembly **200** also comprises a lower or bottom actuator housing member **210** (FIGS. 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6) which is also made from a suitable injection molded plastic.

Referring to FIGS. 3 and 4, the housing member **210** includes a generally circular bottom horizontal wall or floor or base **214** and a circumferential side wall **216** which extends generally unitarily vertically upwardly from a peripheral circumferential edge of the floor **214**. The walls

214 and **216** together define a cup-shaped housing member **210** which defines an interior cavity or chamber **212**. An upper terminal end portion of the side wall **216** defines a circumferentially extending and outwardly projecting flange or collar or ledge or lip **218**. A central bottom circular through aperture or opening **222** in the floor **214** defines an entry into the interior cavity or chamber **212**.

A collar **223** protrudes generally normally unitarily upwardly from a center portion of the interior surface of the floor **214** of the housing member **210**. Wall **223** surrounds and is spaced from the central aperture **222** defined in the floor **214** of the housing member **210**.

The collar **223** defines an interior pocket or cavity or receptacle **225** for a gimbal **226**. Referring to FIGS. 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6, the gimbal **226** defines a central through aperture **227** and an outer surface defining a circumferential recess **228** for an O-ring **229** which provides a flexible mechanical bearing between the interior surface of the collar **223** of the housing member **210** and the gimbal **226**.

More specifically, and referring to FIGS. 5 and 6, the gimbal **226** includes a generally cylindrically shaped head **226a**. The head **226a** includes a circumferentially extending exterior well having an interior cylindrical surface defining the central through aperture **227**. The exterior circumferential surface of the head **226a** of the gimbal **226** includes a pair of circumferentially extending and spaced apart flanges **226b** and **226c** which together define the circumferential recess **228** in the exterior circumferential surface of the head **226a** of the gimbal **226**. A flexible neck **226d** extends and depends unitarily downwardly from the lower exterior circumferential edge of the head **226a** and terminates in a shoulder **226e**. In the embodiment shown, the neck **226d** is in the form of and comprises a plurality of spaced apart and circumferentially extending flexible ribs **226f** each terminating in a flange or shoulder **226e** having an exterior angled camming surface **226g**.

The gimbal **226** is adapted to be snap fitted into and secured to the actuator housing member **210**. Specifically, and referring to FIG. 5, during the process of assembling and manufacturing the assembly **200**, the gimbal **226** is inserted vertically downwardly or inwardly into and through the interior of the collar **223** of the actuator housing member **210** initially into the relationship as shown in FIG. 5 wherein the neck **226d** is located in the collar **223** and the exterior angled camming surface **226g** of the shoulder **226e** on each of the ribs **226f** is brought into abutting relationship with the circumferential surface of the base wall aperture **222** and causes the inward flexing of the neck **226d** and more specifically the ribs **226f** towards each other.

The gimbal **226** is then extended or pushed further downwardly or inwardly into the collar **223** which causes the shoulder **226e** to clear the base wall aperture **222** which in turn causes the neck **226d** and more specifically the ribs **226f** to flex back outwardly from each other into the position as shown in FIGS. 3 and 4 in which the gimbal **226** is snap fitted and secured in the actuator housing **210** in a relationship wherein the neck **226d** and more specifically the neck **226d** and the ribs **226f** defining the same extend through the base wall aperture **222**, the head **226a** of the gimbal **226** is located inside the collar **223**, the base wall **214** is located between the head **226a** and the shoulder **226e** of the gimbal **226** to retain the gimbal **226** in the collar **223**, and the O-ring **229** is located in the recess **228** of the head **226a** and in a relationship surrounding and abutting against both the exterior surface of the head **226a** and the interior surface of the collar **223**.

Thus, in the embodiment shown, the head **226a** of the gimbal **226** has a diameter greater than the diameter of the opening **222**, the neck **226d** has a diameter less than the diameter of both the head **226a** and the opening **222** so as to allow the neck **226d** to be fitted through the opening **222**, and the shoulder **226e** has a diameter greater than the diameter of the opening **222** with the shaft **273** extending through the gimbal **226** to retain and lock the gimbal **226** on the collar **223**.

The floor **214** of the housing member **210** additionally defines a plurality of hollow peripheral heads **230** (FIGS. 3, 4, and 6) protruding outwardly from the interior surface of the floor **214**. Each of the heads **230** defines an opening and a generally ring-shaped collar **230a** projecting outwardly from the exterior surface of the floor **214** of the housing member **210**.

Actuator assembly **200** further comprises a plurality of threaded mounting screws or bolts **234** which are insert molded into the respective heads **230** defined in the floor **214** of the housing member **210**. Specifically, each of the screws **234** includes a head **234a** which is insert molded into the respective head **230** in the floor **214** of the housing member **210** and a ring or flange **234b** which surrounds the head **234b** and extends into abutting relationship with the interior surface of the collar **230a** formed in the floor **214** of the housing member **210**.

Each of the screws **234** further includes a distal leg **234c** adapted to extend through the respective openings of a supporting bracket (not shown) which is fastened to a vehicle engine or engine component such as, for example, a vehicle engine turbocharger.

The respective housing members **22** and **210** are snap-fitted or clipped together as shown in FIG. 1 and together define an interior actuator and sensor assembly cavity that is defined by the combination of the sensor housing cavity **26** and the actuator housing cavity **212**.

Actuator and linear position sensor assembly **200** further comprises a flexible robber plunger or diaphragm **240** (FIGS. 2, 3, and 4) located in the cavity **212** of the housing member **210**. The diaphragm **240** is in the shape of a cup having a bottom annular well or floor or base **241** and a peripheral circumferentially extending vertical side wall **242** including a distal outwardly projecting and circumferentially extending flange or collar or lip or bead **243**. The floor **242** of the diaphragm **240** defines a central opening **244** (FIGS. 3 and 4).

The collar or flange or bead **243** of the diaphragm **240** is wedged and secured between the top exterior surface of the flange **218** of the housing member **210** and the terminal exterior end surface of the wall **23** of the housing member **22** in the coupled and snapped together relationship of the respective housing members **22** and **210** shown in FIGS. 3 and 4.

Actuator and linear position sensor assembly **200** still further comprises a piston washer **336** defining a central aperture **337** (FIGS. 2, 3, and 4). Piston washer **336** is seated in the interior of the assembly **200** against the top exterior peripheral circumferential end surface of the collar **223** of the housing member **210** in a relationship wherein the central aperture **337** of the washer **336** is aligned with the central aperture **222** defined in the floor **214** of the housing member **210**.

Actuator and linear position sensor assembly **200** still further comprises an elongated rod or actuator shaft **270** including opposed ends **272** and **273** (FIGS. 2, 3, and 4). The end **273** of the shaft **270** can be attached to a variety of objects whose linear position requires adjustment or mea-

surement such as, for example, the by-pass or waste gate valve of a turbo-charger associated with a vehicle engine. The end **272** of the shaft **270** additionally defines a head **275**.

A combination piston and magnet carrier assembly **100**, which may be made from a suitable injection molded plastic, is also located in the interior of the assembly **200** and, more specifically, in the cavities **26** and **212** of the respective housing members **22** and **210** as described in more detail below.

Piston/magnet carrier assembly **100** includes a cup **100a** with a horizontal base or floor **102** and a circumferential vertical side wall **110** which extends unitarily generally normally upwardly from the peripheral circumferential edge of the base **102**.

Piston/magnet carrier assembly **100** also includes a hollow tube or receptacle **120** (FIGS. 2, 3, and 4) which, in the embodiment shown, is generally cylindrically shaped and extends centrally unitarily upwardly from the base **102** of the cup **100a** in a relationship generally normal to the base **102**. The tube **120** is defined by a circumferential cylindrical vertical wall that defines an elongate interior magnet receiving bore or pocket or receptacle **124**.

The tube or wall **120** is closed at the top and defines an opening **120a** at the bottom that is defined by a central opening in the base **102** of the cup **100a** of the piston/magnet carrier assembly **100**. The tube or wall **120** defines a base **120b** (FIGS. 3 and 4) in the floor **102** of the cup **100a** and the floor **102** defines one or more apertures **102a** surrounding the base **120b** of the tube **120**.

An elongated magnet **140** is inserted and press fitted into the interior of the tube **120** of the piston/magnet carrier assembly **100** through the opening **120a** in the bottom of the tube **120** during the assembly and manufacturing operation.

The magnet **140** is a permanent magnet that is polarized to define a north pole and a south pole. Magnet **140** can, in one embodiment, be made from any one of several different magnetic materials such as, but not limited to, ferrite or samarium cobalt or neodymium-iron-boron. Magnet **140** can be cylindrical in shape as shown or may be of any other desired shape or configuration such as, for example, square and thus it is also further understood that the tube **120** may also be shaped and configured to accept or house any other differently shaped or configured magnet such as, for example, a square shaped tube to accept or house a square shaped magnet.

The shaft **270** is secured to the cup **100a** of the piston/magnet carrier assembly **100** via a crimp plate **133** (FIGS. 2, 3, and 4) also located in the interior of the housing member **210**. Specifically, during the assembly process, the end **273** of the shaft **270** is extended through a central aperture **133a** defined in the crimp plate **133** and into the relationship as shown in FIGS. 3 and 4 in which the head **275** of the shaft **270** is abutted against the top exterior surface of the crimp plate **133**.

The crimp plate **133** includes a plurality of spaced-apart peripheral crimp fingers **133b** that extend through the one or more apertures **102a** that are defined in the floor **102** of the cup **100a** of the piston/magnet carrier assembly **100** and which are crimped and wrapped around the base **120a** of the tube **120a** for securing the plate **133** to the cup **100a** and thus securing the shaft **270** to the cup **100a** of the piston/magnet carrier assembly **100**.

Thereafter, and still during the assembly process, the piston/magnet carrier assembly **100** with the diaphragm **240** and the shaft **270** coupled thereto is mounted in the interior of the cavity **212** of the housing member **210** into the relationship as shown in FIGS. 3 and 4 wherein the cup **100a**

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of the piston/magnet carrier assembly 100 is seated in the interior of the diaphragm 240 and the diaphragm 240 is seated against the top peripheral surface of the collar 223 of the housing member 210 and the shaft 270 extends successively through the openings 227 and 222 defined in the gimbal 226 and the base 214 of the housing member 210 respectively.

The extension of the end 272 of the actuator rod 270 through the interior of the gimbal 226 also prevents the inward flexing of the gimbal neck 226d and gimbal ribs 226f which in turn prevents the gimbal 226 from sliding out of the collar 223 and thus the rod 270 also acts as a pin that locks the gimbal 226 on the collar 223.

In the embodiment shown, an elastomeric spacer 300 is located in the tube 120 of the magnet carrier 100 and is wedged between the top of the head 275 of the shaft 270 and the bottom of the magnet 140 to allow the control of the position of the magnet 140 in the tube 120.

Also, in the position of FIG. 3, the tube 120 and the magnet 140 are positioned in a co-axial relationship with the central longitudinal vertical axis L of the assembly 200 and further in a relationship spaced from and parallel to the interior wall 36, the interior pocket 40, and the sensor 82 located in the interior pocket 40.

The assembly 200 still further comprises a helical metal coil spring 150 which is also located in the interior of the assembly 200 and, more specifically, is located and mounted in the region of the interior cavity 26 bounded by the interior surface of the roof 27 of the housing member 22 at one end and the base 102 of the piston/magnet carrier assembly 100 at the other end. Coil spring 150 has opposed end coils 152 and 154. End 152 is seated in and against the groove 34 defined in the interior surface of the roof 27 of the housing member 22 and the end 154 is seated against the top surface of the base 102 of cup 100a of the piston/magnet carrier assembly 100. Spring 150 surrounds and is spaced from the tube 120. Spring 150 also surrounds and is spaced from the wall 36 and the sensor pocket 40. Thus, in the embodiment shown, the pocket 40 is located between the magnet carrier tube 120 and the spring 150 and further the spring 160 surrounds both the tube 120 and the pocket 40.

The spring 150 biases and keeps the piston/magnet carrier assembly 100 in a first fully retracted position as shown in FIG. 3 against the top of the collar 223 of the housing member 210 and is oriented such that the spring 150 can be compressed and depressed along the axis of movement of piston/magnet carrier assembly 100.

Although not shown or described in great detail herein, it is understood that the hose or tubing 500 is connected to a source of vacuum such as an engine intake manifold or vacuum tank (not shown). An increase in the vacuum in the tube 500 causes a decrease in the air pressure in the interior of the assembly 200 and causes the piston/magnet assembly 100 to move linearly upwardly from its first position as shown in FIG. 3 to a plurality of intermediate extended linear and angular positions (not shown) in the interior of the assembly 200 wherein the piston/magnet carrier assembly 100 is located entirely in the interior chamber 26 defined by the housing member 22 and the tube 120 is at least partially extended into the interior cavity 28 defined by the dome 29 of the housing member 22. In this second position, the spring 150 would be compressed.

A decrease in the vacuum in the tube 500 and thus an increase in the air pressure in the interior of the assembly 200 and, more specifically, the interior cavities 26 and 212 defined by the respective housing members 22 and 210, causes the piston/magnet carrier assembly 100 to move

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linearly downwardly in the chamber or cavity 212 back to its biased retracted first position of FIG. 3 wherein the plate 336 coupled to the bottom of the piston/magnet carrier assembly 100 is abutted against the top of the wall 223 of the housing member 210 and the spring 150 is in its fully extended position.

Piston/magnet carrier assembly 100 thus is capable of moving linearly and angularly in the interior of the assembly 200 with respect to the Hall Effect sensor 82 which is located inside the pocket 40 in a generally opposed, adjacent, and isolated relationship relative to the magnet 140. The sensor 82 is spaced, separated, and isolated from the magnet 140 by the pocket wall 36. The magnetic field produced by the magnet 140 passes through the wall 36 where the magnitude and/or direction of the magnetic field is sensed by the sensor 82. As the magnet 140 moves linearly and angularly in the interior of the assembly 200 relative to the sensor 82, the north and south poles change position relative to the sensor 82 thus creating a change in the magnitude and/or direction of the magnetic field. The changes in the direction and/or magnitude of the magnetic field can be sensed about two axes by the sensor 82.

Sensor 82 produces an electrical signal that changes in response to the position of the magnet 140 and thereby also a change in the position of the shaft 270. The electrical signal produced by the sensor 82 is indicative of the position of the magnet 140 and the piston/magnet carrier assembly 100. As the magnitude or strength of the magnetic field generated by the magnet 140 varies with the linear movement of the shaft 270, the electrical output signal produced by sensor 82 changes accordingly, allowing the position of the shaft 270 and thus the object coupled thereto to be determined.

As shown in FIG. 4, it is understood that the piston/magnet carrier assembly 100 is adapted for see-saw, tilting, side-to-side movement in the interior cavity of the assembly 200 in response to a tilting, back and forth, side to side movement of the shaft 270 which, in turn, allows for the tilting, side to side movement of the tube 120 and the magnet 140 in the interior cavity of the assembly 200 relative to the sensor 82 which results in a change in the direction of the magnetic flux generated by the magnet 140 which is sensed by the sensor 82.

More specifically, and referring to FIGS. 3 and 4, it is understood that the piston/magnet carrier assembly 100, and still more specifically, the tube 120 and the magnet 140 are adapted for a first up and down vertical and linear movement in a relationship generally co-linear with the vertical longitudinal axis L of the assembly 200 in response to a first linear up and down vertical movement of the moveable object (not shown) connected to the end 273 of the shaft 270 and a second see-saw, tilting, side-to-side movement in a relationship angled to the longitudinal axis L of the assembly 200 in response to the angled side to side movement of the moveable object (not shown) connected to the end 273 of the shaft 270.

Stated yet another way, the sensor 82 is positioned a fixed transverse distance from the longitudinal axis L of the assembly 200 and a variable transverse distance from the magnet 140 depending upon the angle of the magnet 140 relative to the longitudinal axis L of the assembly 200. Thus, the transverse spacing and distance between the sensor 82 and the magnet 140 in a direction transverse to the longitudinal axis L of the assembly 200 is variable in response to the second angular movement of the magnet 140.

It is also understood that the gimbal 226, as also shown in FIG. 4, tilts and moves angularly in the interior of the collar

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223 in response to the tilting and angular movement of the actuator rod 270. The degree of arc or tilt or angular movement of the gimbal 226 is tunable by adjusting or varying the contour or shape of the exterior surface of the gimbal 226 and more specifically the head 226a and neck 226d thereof so as to allow the gimbal 226 to float or move in the interior of the collar 223 relatively free thus reducing constriction and associated wear rate while still providing continuous sealing O-ring contact between the gimbal 226 and collar 223.

While the invention has been taught with specific reference to the embodiment shown, it is understood that a person of ordinary skill in the art will recognize that changes can be made in form and detail without departing from the spirit and the scope of the invention. The described embodiment is to be considered in all respects only as illustrative and not restrictive.

What is claimed is:

1. An actuator and sensor assembly comprising:
 - a sensor housing including an interior wall defining a pocket accessible through an opening in the sensor housing;
 - a sensor substrate located in the pocket through the opening in the sensor housing, the sensor substrate having a sensor and defining a plurality of conductive through-holes;
 - a hose retention assembly including a nozzle extending from the sensor housing and a sleeve surrounding and spaced from the nozzle;
 - a hose coupled to and surrounding the nozzle and the sleeve surrounding and abutting against the hose for retaining the hose on the nozzle;
 - a connector assembly associated with the sensor housing and located opposite and generally normal to the pocket and the substrate and including a plurality of compliant terminal pins extending into the pocket and the plurality of through-holes in the sensor substrate respectively;
 - an actuator housing coupled to the sensor housing and together defining an interior cavity and an actuator housing aperture in communication with the interior cavity, the actuator housing including an interior collar;
 - a gimbal including a head located in the collar and a flexible neck extending through the actuator housing aperture in the actuator housing and terminating in a shoulder that retains the gimbal in the collar of the actuator housing;
 - an O-ring surrounding the head of the gimbal and in sealing abutting relationship with the interior surface of the collar of the actuator housing;
 - a magnet carrier located and movable in the interior cavity and including a magnet adapted to generate a magnetic field and the sensor adapted to sense a change in the magnetic field in response to the movement of the carrier and the magnet in the interior cavity relative to the sensor; and
 - an actuator shaft including a first end extending through the aperture in the actuator housing and the gimbal and coupled to the magnet carrier.
2. The actuator and sensor assembly of claim 1 further comprising:
 - a flexible diaphragm located in the interior cavity, the magnet carrier being seated on the flexible diaphragm;
 - a spring located in the interior cavity against the magnet carrier and biasing the magnet carrier in a first position; and

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a source of pressurization coupled to one of the sensor housing or the actuator housing and in fluid flow communication with the interior cavity for adjusting the pressure in the interior cavity and causing the movement of the flexible diaphragm and the magnet carrier.

3. The actuator and sensor assembly of claim 1 comprising a plurality of clips on one of the sensor housing or the actuator housing for coupling the sensor housing and the actuator housing together.

4. The actuator and sensor assembly of claim 1 further comprising a plug for sealing the opening defined in the sensor housing and a spacer located in the pocket between the substrate and the plug for exerting a compressive force against the substrate and preventing vibration of the substrate.

5. The actuator and sensor assembly of claim 1 wherein the plurality of terminal pins extend through the interior wall of the pocket and into the pocket.

6. The actuator and sensor assembly of claim 1 wherein the connector assembly further comprises a holder for the plurality of terminal pins, the holder being retained in a through-hole defined in the interior wall of the pocket.

7. The actuator and sensor assembly of claim 1 wherein the neck the gimbal is comprised of a plurality of spaced apart ribs adapted for flexing movement towards and away from each other during coupling of the gimbal to the collar of the actuator housing.

8. A sensor assembly comprising:

a sensor housing including an interior wall defining a pocket accessible through an opening defined in the sensor housing;

a substrate located in the interior pocket through the opening in the sensor housing and defining a plurality of conductive through-holes;

a sensor on the substrate;

a connector assembly unitary with the sensor housing and positioned in a relationship opposite and generally normal to the pocket and the substrate, the connector assembly including a plurality of compliant terminal pins extending into the plurality of conductive through-holes in the substrate and in a relationship generally normal to the substrate; and

a magnet located in the sensor housing in a relationship spaced from the pocket of the sensor housing and the sensor, the magnet generating a magnetic field and the sensor adapted to sense a change in the magnitude and direction of the magnetic field in response to the movement of the magnet relative to the sensor.

9. The sensor assembly of claim 8 wherein the connector assembly includes a holder for the plurality of terminal pins, the holder being retained in the interior wall of the pocket.

10. An actuator assembly comprising:

an actuator housing defining an interior cavity and an interior wall defining an aperture in communication with the interior cavity, the actuator housing including an interior collar;

a gimbal including a head located in the collar and a flexible neck extending through the aperture in the actuator housing and terminating in a shoulder that retains the gimbal in the collar of the actuator housing;

an O-ring surrounding the head of the gimbal and in sealing abutting relationship with the interior surface of the collar of the actuator housing; and

an actuator shaft including a first end extending through the aperture in the actuator housing and the gimbal and coupled to the magnet carrier.

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11. The actuator assembly of claim **10** wherein the flexible neck is comprised of a plurality of flexible ribs each including a shoulder having an exterior angled surface, the ribs being adapted for flexing movement towards and away from each other when the gimbal is secured to the collar of the actuator housing. 5

12. The actuator assembly of claim **11** further comprising an actuator shaft extending through the gimbal.

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